

VZCZCXR06699

PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK
DE RUEHGB #4096/01 3052020

ZNY CCCCC ZZH

P 012020Z NOV 06

FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7803

INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RHEHAAA/WHITE HOUSE WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

RHEHAAA/WHITE HOUSE WASHINGTON DC//NSC// PRIORITY

RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 004096

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/31/2016

TAGS: PREL PGOV PINS I2

SUBJECT: SCIRI CHAIRMAN HAKIM DISCUSSES MISTAKES, MILITIAS,
AND SECURITY

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Daniel V. Speckhard for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: In an October 17 meeting with National Security Advisor to the Vice President John Hannah and the Charge, Abdulaziz al-Hakim, leader of the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), said that Iraq had realized significant achievements in the short time since its liberation but lamented missed opportunities and the current security situation. He stressed the need to clarify security responsibilities and authorities between the multinational forces (MNF-I) and the Iraqi government, pointing to recent violence in Balad as an example of a breakdown in coordination. Al-Hakim said that the problem of militias needed a rapid solution and called for the implementation of CPA Order 91. Hannah noted that U.S. officials were looking forward to al-Hakim's upcoming visit to the United States, and al-Hakim expressed his hope to visit Washington as soon as possible after the U.S. elections. END SUMMARY.

Achievements and Missed Opportunities

¶2. (C) Looking back over the three and a half years since the U.S. invasion, al-Hakim noted that Iraq had made some significant achievements in a short period of time, particularly the transition from dictatorship to a democratic government based on elections and a constitution. Despite the current security problems, al-Hakim said, "the government is strong and we are not afraid it will fail." However, he continued, the US had made mistakes by not fully understanding the reality of Iraq and the hatred and fear engendered by Saddam Hussein and the Baathists. He criticized the lack of a good post-invasion plan, pointing out the political and security vacuum created by a gap between liberation and transfer of sovereignty, and by America's lack of trust that Iraqi partners who had fought Saddam's regime for years could help secure the country. The Iraqi opposition, he claimed, had warned the US in a March 2003 meeting in Ankara that it was not possible for a foreign army to control Iraq's internal security. "We needed Iraqi forces to control the Iraqi streets, like in Kurdistan," al-Hakim argued, noting that using Iraqi forces would have required forming a national unity government on the day the regime fell to avoid such a vacuum.

Security: Seeking Clear Definition of Roles

¶3. (C) Al-Hakim also expressed his belief that the lack of clearly defined responsibilities and authorities between MNF-I and the Iraqi government was hindering progress in the

security sector. "Who is responsible where?" he asked. "Is it the Prime Minister? MOD? MOI? MNF-I? A committee?" Al-Hakim cited recent violence in Balad as an example of this lack of clarity. The Policy Council for National Security, he said, told the Prime Minister that he needed to protect Balad residents. According to al-Hakim, the Prime Minister responded that he had given orders for troops to move to Balad, but that MNF-I had not allowed the movement. "To people it seems that MNF-I wants their slaughter," al-Hakim said. "We must tell people we have responsibility for security if we can provide it, or tell them that we cannot provide it and that they should leave or find their own protection." Noting that MNF-I was the backbone of security in Iraq at present, Al-Hakim agreed with the Charge on the importance of coming to an understanding on security responsibilities as part of renewing UN Security Council Resolution 1546. However, he said that it would be difficult to get parliamentary approval without major changes to the current arrangement.

Militias and Sectarianism

¶4. (C) Hannah noted to al-Hakim his concern about the impact sectarian militias were having on Iraq's security. Al-Hakim agreed that militias were a major problem that needed rapid resolution. Differentiating between those formed before Saddam fell, like Badr, and those formed after, like Jaysh al-Mahdi, al-Hakim said that CPA Order 91 laid out a plan to demobilize and reintegrate the first category of militia, but that the US was "impeding its implementation." He noted that the Facility Protection Service constituted a major militia problem, with up to 140,000 armed and equipped members accountable only to their individual ministries. He also

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lamented the sectarian basis of the ministries themselves: "The ministries controlled by Kurds hire Kurds, the same with the Sadrist and Dawa, etc. These are state institutions, not party institutions. There should not be a quota system."

When pressed by Hannah directly on whether al-Hakim welcomes the day when former Badr members in the army of police are loyal to the Prime Minister's orders, even when they run contrary to the wishes of Abdulaziz al-Hakim, al-Hakim answered without hesitation: "Yes. People who have joined the state must be obedient to the state, not to Abdulaziz al-Hakim." Al-Hakim insisted that since returning to Iraq, Badr had committed to transforming itself from a military organization to a political one. He alleged that the six governorates currently led by SCIRI/Badr members made their own decisions as institutions of the Iraqi state, not based on the direction of SCIRI/Badr organizations. Al-Hakim further insisted that those former Badr members now serving in the Iraqi Security Forces were first and foremost loyal to the state, not Badr.

¶5. (C) When asked by Hannah to describe the main enemy in Iraq, Al-Hakim stressed that the real threat to Iraq comes from the Baathists, Saddamists, and Taqfiris who seek the failure of the new forces in Iraq and the failure of the US. These forces will accept nothing less than full control of Iraq. He described how since the day of liberation they have attacked the new Iraqi government, the Coalition, the UN, and the Shi'a. He stressed that for a long time Shi'a leaders were able to control the Shi'a street, but that persistent vulnerability to sectarian attacks against the Shi'a - particularly after the Samarra bombing - made it impossible to stop the inevitable retaliatory attacks. Al-Hakim noted again that the primary enemy includes the Saddamists and Takfiris, who openly oppose the constitution, the elections, and the government of Iraq.

¶6. (C) Hannah told al-Hakim that the US relied on Iraqi leaders like him to make difficult decisions and asked him to convey U.S. appreciation and regards to Grand Ayatollah

Sistani for his courage and leadership. He praised Sistani for his restraint and wisdom, noting that he is greatly respected and appreciated by the President, Vice President, and senior U.S. officials. Al-Hakim expressed his thanks, saying "we hope to achieve what has been given to us in responsibility."

¶7. (U) This cable was cleared by OVPNSA John Hannah.
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